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ABSTRACT

The teacher's role in supporting students as they shifted from teacher-led discussions to student-led discussions was studied as part of an ethnographic study of teacher-student interactions in a third grade classroom serving 29 students. Field notes, video recordings, transcripts of classroom sessions, and teacher interviews were used to collect information about patterns of student and teacher participation during teacher-led and student-led literature classes. The teacher's role within the literature discussion groups was active, complex, and dynamic. The change from a teacher-led discussion format was not easily accomplished. Students tended to fall back into old patterns, but the teacher facilitated and supported their growth in problem solving, interactional competence, and discussion content. The examination of several emergent themes from classroom discussions shows that the teacher used a variety of intervention techniques to scaffold students' development understandings of the discussion process. The teacher's support was required as students developed the "how" and "what' of literature discussion groups. Appendixes contain transcription conventions and the transcript of a discussion. (Contains 37 references.) (SLD)

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Shifting To Student-Centered, Collaborative Classrooms:

Implementing Student-Led Discussion Groups

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Shifting To Student-Centered, Collaborative Classrooms: Implementing Student-Led Discussion Groups

In the majority of discussions about literature in today's classrooms, the teacher assumes a leadership role. The teacher determines both the focus of the discussion and the specific questions asked. Those who support this format suggest that by leading the discussion the teacher is able to guide students toward a better understanding of the text, and to draw attention to particularly salient themes and issues (Andre, 1979; Durkin, 1990; Menke & Pressley, 1994).

Others argue, however, that overt teacher leadership may encourage procedural interaction (i.e., raising hands, waiting to be called on, answering a question), and therefore a procedural understanding of the literature (Barnes, 1975; Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Typically characterized by an interaction pattern of teacher initiation, student response, and teacher evaluation (commonly referred to as IRE, initiation-response-evaluation), teacher-led discussions can place students in a passive, responsive role (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1979). Moreoever, the teacher's interpretation is often privileged over the students' interpretations and can limit students' interpretive strategies to those that help identify the teacher's "correct" interpretation.

These researchers suggest that a less teacher-centered discussion format--that is, a student-led discussion where the teacher functions as a facilitator--may encourage students to engage in more "problem-solving talk," which in turn leads to a more complete understanding of the literature. One type of student-led discussion, literature discussion groups, has received much attention in the last few years. Literature discussion groups, the focus of this study, are groups of 4-6 students who come together to read and discuss a shared piece of literature. The groups are based on interest, rather than ability, and thus are heterogeneous with respect to ability.

Proponents of literature discussion groups (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Gambrell & Almasi, 1997; Harste, Short, & Burke, 1988; Jewell & Pratt, 1999; Routman, 1991; Short, Kaufman, Kaser, Kahn, & Crawford, 1999) argue that these groups allow students to engage in discussions

of topics that are relevant and important to them, thereby promoting a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the text. In contrast to the IRE pattern characteristic of teacher-led discussions, literature discussion groups feature participation structures that provide students with more leadership opportunities and more time to talk. Research on participation structures (e.g., Almasi, 1995; Au, 1980) indicate that when students are allowed more time to talk about topics that are meaningful to them, their responses are more complex than when they simply respond to teacher's questions. As a result, many teachers are experimenting with new formats of literature discussion--including literature discussion groups. However, the transition from a teacher-led format to a student-led one entails a significant shift in the roles and demands of all participants. Worthy and Beck (1995) note that moving toward more student-led discussion involves changing the teacher's role from "lesson controller to discussion facilitator, through changes in teacher-student interactions." (p. 313) Teachers making this shift from recitation-style discussions to more democratic ones find that their role in these discussions becomes much more complex (Pierce, 1990).

Researchers such as Lewis (1995) and Evans (1996) note the danger of moving in this direction too quickly or without teacher support. They suggest that literature discussion groups do not always feature the type of equitable dialogue touted by advocates of the approach and sometimes recreate the more inequitable relationships present in the larger classroom within the discussion group--particularly when the teacher is not present. Thus, though the work on literature discussion groups is predominately positive, there is evidence that points to a need for further exploration of the dynamics of the discussion process and the teacher's role in supporting students as they shift into new roles of participation.

While several researchers have provided insights about the ways teachers can support students in their understanding of literature discussion groups (Jewell & Pratt, 1999; McMahon, 1996; Short et. al, 1999; Wells, 1995; Wiencek, 1996), there have been few studies that investigate how teachers support students during the moment-to-moment interactions within a

discussion as students and teachers transition toward more democratic discussion formats. The shift students and teachers make and more specifically, the teacher's role in scaffolding students' shift in participation structures and task demands, is not well-known.

The study described here focused specifically on this role, examining teacher-student interactions as they transitioned together toward a more student-led discussion structure. The central question that this research asks is: *What is the relationship between the teacher's role and students' participation in literature discussion groups* ? More specifically, the results reported here address the factors that influence the teacher's role during the ongoing literature discussion group process.

Methods

Overview of the Study

This study sought to investigate a teacher's role in supporting students as they shifted from teacher-led discussions to student-led discussions. Data analyzed and reported in this paper were collected as part of a 6-month ethnographic study of teacher-student interactions in a 3rd grade classroom serving 29 students (14 males, 15 females) of varying ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (15 Caucasian, 11 African-American, 3 Asian). The research procedures were guided by the assumptions of interpretive/constructivist ethnography (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lincoln, 1997).

Classroom context

The classroom explored in this study was in a school located in the suburbs of a mid-size metropolitan city. The school drew its student population from both the surrounding middle-class neighborhoods, as well as from lower-income neighborhoods in the inner city.

Ms. P, in her fifth year of teaching, was in the process of moving toward a more student-centered classroom. She involved students in such activities as hands-on science, collaborative groupwork, novel study, writer's workshop, and sustained silent reading. She held a problem-

solving view of both learning and social interaction, encouraging students to work through problems and/or conflicts and providing them with strategies to use in doing so. Out of her belief in allowing students a voice and choices in the classroom came the desire to begin using literature discussion groups.

Ms. P began the implementation of literature discussion groups during the second semester. To group students for the discussions, she generally began by presenting several books from which students could choose. Then, she organized the groups according to the students' choices. Thus, the groups were based on interest.

During the course of this study, students were able to participate in two cycles of literature discussion groups. For definitional purposes, a cycle included (a) the introduction of books by the teacher, (b) the expression of student preferences, (c) the formation of groups, based on these preferences, by the teacher, (d) the production of guidelines by individual groups, (e) discussion of literature, usually taking 3-4, 30 minute sessions, (f) small group and whole group self-evaluation of process, and (g) any concluding activities accompanying book reading.

Data Collection Techniques

Four phases were used to collect data, as outlined by Rowe (1994): (1) field entry, (2) developing hypotheses, (3) hypothesis refinement, and (4) field exit.[1] Data collection involved ethnographic techniques of participant observation, expanded field notes (FN)[2], videotape, audiotape, interviews with the teacher (TI) and the students (SI), and collection of artifacts. Observations, accompanied by video and audiotaping, ranged from 2-3 days weekly (full-day observations) in the beginning phases of the research to five days weekly (two hours daily) during phase three, in which data collection had narrowed and intensified its focus specifically to the actual literature discussion group sessions. Approximately thirty literature discussion groups were

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[1] Space limitations prohibit extended discussion of these phases in this paper. Interested readers are referred to Rowe (1994).

[2] Expanded field notes included methodological notes (MN) and theoretical notes (TN).

videotaped across the two cycles previously discussed.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was ongoing during all phases of data collection using the constant-comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The analyses reported here use as data sources (a) expanded field notes, video recordings, and transcripts of the literature discussion group sessions and accompanying activities, (b) teacher interviews concerning the process of change, and (c) extensive theoretical memos used to reference developing hypotheses and guide sampling decisions.

Data were reviewed to identify and categorize patterns of student and teacher participation. Once categories were identified, rules and definitions were developed which served to identify, delimit, and justify the categories. Negative cases were then sought and analyzed to check and revise categories. Sociolinguistic microanalyses of student and teacher participation patterns were conducted, both during data collection and more extensively following data collection, to refine and further develop categories. Teacher interventions within the discussions and the student utterances preceding and following those interventions were the focus of the microanalysis.

Findings

The teacher's role within the literature discussion groups was active, complex and dynamic. In fact, the teacher was present during the discussions--sitting just outside the circle. She acted as a facilitator and a mediator, rather than a leader. Instead of orchestrating the discussion from the outset of the discussion, she responded to what students generated. This resulted in a back and forth movement, jumping in and out of the discussion, rather than a linear, static mode of participation.

The intricacies of this role are discussed here in relation to three salient themes which emerged from the data: (1) the problematic nature of the students' shift in responsibility, (2) the progression of the teacher's emphasis over time and across groups, and (3) the responsive nature

of the teacher's interventions relevant to students' interactional difficulties. The first theme--the problematic nature of the students' shift in responsibility--establishes a foundation for the second and third themes, which explore the teacher's response to students' struggle.

Theme 1: The problematic nature of students' shift in responsibility

Challenges that resulted from shifting roles of responsibility within the discussions was a major theme in the data. The shift from a teacher-led discussion format to a student-led discussion was not easily accomplished. The students' struggle with a new discussion format comes as no surprise, given their individual and collective histories, featuring a preponderance of teacher-led activities where discussions were guided by the teacher and students were responsive to the teacher's lead. The interactional norms established in their familiar, teacher-led discussions were no longer appropriate in the literature discussion groups. As a result, the transition to a structure where students were responsible for discussion leadership was neither straightforward nor easy.

In the initial literature discussion groups, students and the teacher fell back into norms previously established in teacher-led discussions. These norms--raising hands, waiting for the teacher's leadership, looking to the teacher to help solve problems--were evident particularly in the first few literature discussion group sessions.

Ms. P noted these difficulties in both her note-taking (which occurred during the literature discussion groups), as well as in her review of the videotapes of the discussion groups. As she took notes during the first few group sessions, she commented that students were having "difficulty getting going," (Teacher notes, 3/23/98) that they were "not discussing as well," (Teacher notes, 3/25/99) and that they "didn't get it yet" (Teacher notes, 3/23/99). As she reviewed the videotapes later, she remarked that students were "not really listening to each other," (3/19/98) that they were "not responding to each other and don't seem to be understanding much of what others are saying" (3/26/98). As noted by Ms. P, students struggled in their discussions, yet this struggle played out differently with different students.

In some of the most extreme cases, groups sat in silence, not sure how to begin. When

they did begin talking, individual students did not connect their statements to statements made by others, thereby creating a sort of round-robin share time instead of a conversation about literature. The following transcript, taken from the first literature discussion group that met, is representative of several of the initial group meetings (see Appendix A for transcription conventions). Students' comments were made using little expression and slow speech with a high frequency of significant pauses and periods of silence. Further, students' body language (e.g., body leaning away from others, lack of eye contact, furtive glances around the room) indicated a lack of interest in other's comments. Non-verbal behaviors and contextual notes have been highlighted using bold and italics. MS. P is the teacher. The group is discussing Molly's Pilgrim, a novel about a student (Molly) and her family who move to America from another country. In this particular excerpt, students are discussing Molly's interpretation of the class assignment to make pilgrim dolls.

Nancy: She wanted to move back where she was from because all the students were making fun of her ***[pause]*** and her mother said that they can't go to a certain place because her father had to work very late ***[pause]*** and he was working hard and they probably had to look for another house

Anna: And, they had to make, all take a pin, and ***[picks up book showing front cover]*** and make a doll, take a pin and make one

. . . . . .

Evette: Elizabeth was checking everybody's dolls and Molly put her doll in her desk because it didn't ***[pause]*** look like a pilgrim in the book ***[pause]*** and Elizabeth thought she didn't do her homework ***[pause]*** so and Molly said she did and pulled out her bag and pulled out her doll and Elizabeth and her friends laughed.

Anna: She had told her mama about it and *** going to school and her mama said don't worry about it because the teacher might not understand but she'll see ***[silence for almost a minute -- Ms. P looks up briefly and looks back down to her notes; students look down and around a little bit]***

Anna: Angela? Nancy? ***[Muffled, hard to hear]*** ***[Significant pause]***

N: Everybody was singing a song in music that she couldn't read//

Anna: Yeah

N: about her that she couldn't read very well ***[pause]*** and they made fun of her because she couldn't read and *** the doll

Ms. P; ***[nods]***
[silence for about 20 seconds]
[Transcript, 3/16/99]

In the above example, students seem to be retelling what happened in the story. While research indicates that retelling is a strategy students often engage in when discussing literature, the students here appear to be simply giving a literal restatement of the text. They did so not to work through confusing details, but because they were not sure what else to do. This confusion becomes even more apparent later in the discussion as one of the students remarks, "I don't even know how to have a discussion" (Transcript, 3/16/99).

Other groups, although carrying on a discussion, still tended to revert to norms more appropriate in teacher-led discussions. For instance, students regarded the teacher as the most important member of the discussion group, despite preliminary discussions in which new student and teacher roles were addressed. The students' tendency to depend on Ms. P for leadership was most evident during those times that she was absent from the group. In the group discussing Molly's Pilgrim (3/16), described earlier, when Ms. P left for a couple of minutes, students completely stopped their conversation. In another group, discussing Horrible Harry (3/19), although it did not stop completely, the discussion became quite stilted and disconnected when Ms. P left. Thus, it is evident that students struggled with transitioning from one discussion/interactional format to another. The teacher's response to these struggles is the main focus of this paper and is detailed in the next two sections.

Theme 2: The Progression of Teacher Emphasis

The teacher's role varied across time and across groups in response to students' needs and understanding of the discussion process. She facilitated and supported students' growth in three broad areas: (1) problem solving--the teacher mediated and helped support students as they worked through conflicts, (2) interactional competence--she suggested and highlighted strategies students could use to become better 'discussors' (connecting to previous speaker, keeping to the topic,

asking follow-up questions, acknowledging other's comments), and (3) discussion content--the teacher suggested questions and often pushed students to delve deeper into a particular topic or support their comments with evidence from the text.

Based on the somewhat limited research available concerning the teacher's role (see above discussion), I expected Ms. Peterson's role to be an active one, primarily focused on helping "push" the content of the discussion. In other words, I expected her to participate as a more sophisticated reader of literature, possibly introducing literary discourse in the discussion.

I discovered, in fact, that the teacher did play a very active role in the discussion. However, this role was more about supporting students in their shifting interpersonal and interactional roles than pushing the actual content of the discussion. In other words, the teacher focused on helping students *build* some sort of conversation--the students' immediate need--before she focused on *deepening* that conversation.

The teacher's role varied across time and across the ten groups (a set of five groups in each cycle) in response to students' needs and understanding of the discussion process. Overall, though, she facilitated and supported students' growth in three areas. Broadly, the teacher's instructional support progressed from an initial emphasis on problem-solving to an interactional emphasis and finally to a content emphasis. This shift was mediated by the students' competence in these areas and the nature and context of the task. These three emphases are desribed briefly below. Then, the following section includes a more in-depth discussion of the interactional emphasis.

Problem-solving emphasis. During initial observations of Ms. P's interactions with students during group discussions, her interventions--based on the students' needs at the time--were primarily related to problem-solving or interpersonal conflict resolutation. These interventions typically involved issues of cooperation, respect, and other demands of being a group. During this time, Ms. P often served as a mediator of problems, acting as a sort of "go-between" to help resolve conflicts. Moreover, she encouraged students to engage in conflict

resolutation independently, suggesting strategies (i.e., listening to other's concerns, using eye contact, being sensitive to other's feelings) or particular ways of stating concerns to others. Also, there was a particular emphasis on the importance of being a "group," specifically the importance of remaining in the group to work through conflicts or problems, rather than leaving or avoiding the problem. Responsibility was placed on both the member who seemed to be the source of the conflict, as well as on the other members in the group, to work through the problem.

Interactional emphasis. As the students became more able to work through their own interpersonal conflicts, Ms. P shifted her focus from problem-solving to helping students develop interactional competence. To do this, Ms. P intervened to suggest and/or highlight strategies students could use to become better 'discussors.' Ms. P suggested strategies such as asking follow-up questions, using names to ask questions, recognizing comments of others, and using evidence. The strategies encouraged by Ms. P were consistently alligned with her goals for the group discussions. These goals and corresponding strategies are summarized in Table 1 below.

Content emphasis. Finally, as students became more able to resolve their own conflicts and interact with one another effectively, Ms. P shifted her focus to the actual content of the discussion. While earlier interventions had focused on the *process* of the discussion, these interventions emphasized the *content*, focusing on the questions students were asking and the length of time spent on a topic. For example, Ms. P suggested thoughtful questions and often pushed students to delve deeper into a particular topic or support their comments with evidence from the text.

Ms. P's interventions followed the progression from problem-solving to interaction to content, in a very broad way. That is, these different emphases were neither absoluate or completely linear. There was not monolithic shift from emphasis to emphasis as all students were suddenly more able in a particular area. The shift was dynamic. Her interventions depended upon the needs of the students and varied across groups and across time. Thus, if a group struggled with interactional issues, she responded with interventions focused on developing interactional

Table 1: Teacher's Expectations and Associated Strategies

Teacher Goals/ Expectations	Further explanation of goal	Strategies associated with goal
All members are involved and included in the discussion.	(a) Share own responses (b) Invite others to share (c) Acknowledge and value other's comments.	• Ask questions, using names, to invite participation. • Acknowledge other's comments by: (a) asking follow-up question, (b) restating to check your understanding, (c) thanking person for sharing • Enter conversation by using follow-up question, or saying "I agree" or "I disagree"
The discussion is cohesive.	(a) Responses or turns are linguistically and/or semantically connected (b) Cohesive discussions are often characterized by longer amounts of time on a particular topic.	• Ask follow-up questions which continue a line of thought • Use phrases such as "I agree/disagree b/c" or "like Nancy said" to connect to another's comment • Make semantic/meaning connections between speakers and between topics.
Discussion participants generate substantive discussion topics.	(a) Students will generate topics for discussion (b) Discussion topics will be substantive (help generate in-depth conversations)	• Refer to literature response log for topics to share • Refer to book (i.e. illustrations, interesting quotes) for topics to share • Generate your own topics that relate to existing discussion
The discussion focuses on one common topic or text at a time.	(a) Centers around a shared piece of text (b) Is closely related to book, although personal connections are stressed (c) Centers on one common topic at a time	• Identify page numbers or section of book (if there is one) that sparked a question • Retell story • When participants are not focusing, alert peers
Participants support responses by sharing reasoning	(a) Share reasoning (b) Invite others to share reasoning	• Ask follow-up questions (I.e Why do you say that?) when participants use one-word or non-descript answers • Include reasoning in your responses • When appropriate, share book quotes to support responses

Still, this progression was evident across the groups and seems sensible. If there is not some sort of collaboration or cooperation, in which diverse opinions coexist, it is very difficult to have a literary discussion. Likewise, students who are naive in their ability to interact with one another effectively need interactional skills and strategies either before or in tandem with more content-focused instruction.

Interactional skills and strategies were the main focus of analysis discussed in this paper. In the next section, I discuss this theme in more depth way.

Theme 3: The responsive nature of the teacher's interventions

Students' lack of interactional expertise in the new participation structure often resulted in unfocused, unproductive conversations. In response, the teacher intervened in a number of ways to help students develop interactional skills. Table 2 outlines the strategies and corresponding goals that were encouraged by Ms. P during this time. The variety of ways in which she intervened within the discussion to teach or highlight those strategies will be the focus of the following discussion.

In essence, Ms. P acted as a discourse guide--guiding students as they engaged in dialogue within literature discussion groups. She did this by making the discussion process more visible to the students. She drew upon and built their metacognitive knowledge of the discussion. By making these invisible processes explicit, she was able to hold these up for reflection and evaluation, thereby forwarding students' discussion expertise. She not only made these processes more visible, she made available to students strategies they could use in their discussions. She scaffolded students in their appropriation of these strategies, sometimes in overtly instructional ways, using a variety of interactional pedagogic techniques. Not surprisingly, her use of these techniques (i.e., reconstructive recaps, elicitations, reinforcement, extending, refining) varied in explicitness and in frequency across groups, individuals, and time.

To illustrate how she used these varying techniques to support students' participation in the discussion process, I will take one strategy (follow-up questions), which was used for a variety of

purposes, and demonstrate the range of interventions and students' growing understanding and use of it. The transcript I will use to illustrate these techniques is taken from the same group used in the earlier example. As the reader may recall, the students, involved in their first literature discussion group, enacted a very stilted discussion that was marked by awkward pauses and little in-depth discussion of topics. Following that portion of the discussion, Ms. P stepped in to highlight what the students were doing (i.e., retelling) and suggested a question for discussion. The following transcript picks up at this point. To best facilitate discussion of the teacher's interventions, the transcript will be provided in excerpts, each followed by a brief analytical explanation of the teacher's interventions (the complete, uninterrupted transcript segment appears in Appendix B).

> **Ms. P:** And, how would you have felt if you were Molly walking in, knowing that your pilgrim doll didn't look quite like everybody else's? *[Pause]*
>
> **Nancy**: Sad
>
> **Ms. P:** ok *[moves her hands in a circular motion, trying to get other students to jump in]* Are you guys going to let her get away with just saying sad?
>
> **Anna:** Sad and
>
> **Evette:** ***
>
> **N:** embarrassed
> [Transcript, 3/16/98]

In this excerpt, students hesitantly began to answer Ms. P's question, but used one word answers. Knowing that one word answers would most likely not facilitate a rich discussion, Ms. P elicited follow-up questions from the students to encourage their peers to share their reasoning behind their answers. However, the cues she gave students to elicit that strategy were not explicit enough. First, she tried cuing students through hand gestures, no doubt trying to stay in her preferred role of being a marginal participant. She then followed this by asking, "Are you guys going to let her get away with just saying 'sad'?" This elicitation indirectly indicated to students that one word answers, such as "sad," were not sufficient, and that they had a role in changing

their peers' responses. However, this did not seem to be enough information at that point, as evidenced by the students' continued use of one word answers. In response, Ms. P became more direct and more explicit in her elicitation, quickly following that elicitation with a demonstration of the strategy.

Ms. P: Is somebody going to ask why? Why did you feel sad, Nancy?

Anna: Because//

Nancy: Because everybody's talking about it and it didn't look like the one in the book

Ms. P: and that would make you sad because?

N: Because they were making fun of her doll, saying that their doll was best than hers

. . . .

N: I might want to feel embarrassed//

Anna: Because other people's *** were better than yours?

Evette: I would feel embarrassed because ***, the reason I would feel embarrassed was the doll didn't look like the one in the book

N: Why would you feel that way?

E: Because it didn't look like a pilgrim *[Nancy nods]*
[Transcript; 3/16/98]

Following the teacher's direct, explicit elicitation and subsequent modeling, students began sharing their reasoning, as evidenced by the used of the word "because" and phrases such as "the reason I would" (highlighted in the above excerpt). Additionally, students began asking each other follow-up questions. After a few more turns at talk, students returned briefly to using one-word answers with long pauses in the midst of their discussion.

Anna: sad and *[pause]*
Ms. P looks at group, kind of looking puzzled that they aren't talking

Nancy: may feel mad at/ may feel mad

Ms. P:are you gonna//

Evette: Why would you feel mad? *[Ms. P smiles, pats Evette on knee, and says quietly 'good job, Evette']*

N: because . . You're kind of sad and your mad at the girl because she was making fun of you and the doll; get mad
[Transcript, 3/16/98]

In response to students' use of one word answers, Ms. P waited, giving them a slight cue that something was awry by her puzzled look. Then, she started to ask the same question that she began with earlier, "Are you gonna [let her get away with just saying 'mad']?" Earlier in the discussion, that cue had been too vague. This time, however, students picked up on it immediately, to the point of interrupting her to ask the follow-up question. The students and teacher had built up shared, or common knowledge of this strategy and when to use it (Mercer, 1995). Therefore, the more explicit cue was not as necessary. Still, the students were far from being experts at using this strategy. Further interactions within varying contexts would allow them to build up a more complex knowledge of when and how to use this strategy to facilitate their discussion.

Nancy: I would feel kind of very very, um very embarrassed when the teacher came up and said 'where is your doll' or '** your doll'. I'd feel very embarrassed if *[pause]* if she came up and said that and she's going to show it to the whole class

Evette: Why?

N: Because um when um she might um I might think that she would think that I didn't do my homework and she might pull my card

Ms. P: Good question. See how much we learned from Nancy because of your question? Wow. Nancy, what you might be able to do right here is to ask somebody else, 'how would you feel in that situation?'
[Transcript, 3/16/98]

Here, Ms. P used another technique to support and encourage the students' use of the strategy. She highlighted its benefits. She used the technique of highlighting benefits often when students made naive attempts at new strategies. This served to make them more aware of what they were doing and what was occurring as a result. Essentially, this technique is a type of

reconstructive recap, discussed later, in which the teacher points out what has already happened but with a positive slant, reinforcing student behavior. Also in this excerpt, the teacher began to extend students' use of strategies by suggesting a new one--that of asking others questions to involve them in discussion. Next, as the discussion continued, students became overly enthusiastic about the use of the follow-up questioning strategy.

Nancy: *[turns to Angela]* how would you feel?

Angela: embarrassed

N: Why?

Angela: because the teacher might think I didn't do my homework *[looking at Ms. P as she finishes]*

Anna and Evette: Why?

Ms. P: ok, let's try to add instead of asking why, you guys are doing good on that, let's ask a little bit more. Why *[to Angela]* would you think the teacher might think you didn't do your homework?

Angela: Because I didn't have it out on my desk and I was hiding it under something
[Transcript, 3/16/99]

In the above excerpt, students began using the "why" question after every turn at talk, even when the person had sufficiently explained their reasoning. Students knew to use the strategy but were not clear about when to use the strategy and when <u>not</u> to use it. In response, Ms. P stepped in to help students refine or extend their understanding of this strategy by suggesting they add on to their follow-up question. Finally, in the last piece of this episode, shown below, Ms. P steps in to recap what has just occurred in the discussion.

Ms. P: Ok, you guys are on the right track right here. Nancy shared something and then asked Angela. You guys asked both Nancy and Angela to explain a little bit more. And Anna just felt that she was able to share right after Angela. She didn't have to be asked, she just felt like she could. Anna thanks for jumping on in. What other things did you think, that stuck out to you in this chapter, in this portion that you read, that you really wanted to share and talk about//
[Transcript, 3/16/99]

Using a technique that I have labelled a reconstructive recap (term adapted from Neil

Mercer, 1995), the teacher recounted for the students what had just occurred. What is notable in this recap is that the teacher did not recap the content of the discussion, but the process. She remarked on who talked and who questioned and how they entered the conversation--all interactional skills. By doing so, she made their discussion process more visible to her students and thus, most likely, made it more understandable. There was also an evaluatory tone in which she positively reinforced this process, encouraging students to engage in these practices in future discussions.

The extended transcript and analysis above illustrates the range of pedagogic techniques used by Ms. P in response to the students' developing understanding of interactional processes and strategies. Starting with a less explicit, less direct cuing technique that was inadequate in eliciting the strategy, she moved on to more explicit methods, such as modeling and direct elicitations. Then, as students began to show a tentative understanding of the strategy, she moved back to less explicit cues for elicitation and focused on extending students' understanding of the strategy. Finally, she recapped the process for the students, thus making it more available for reflection.

This particular episode was chosen for the discussion here because of the inclusion of so many different intervention techniques, all centering around one particular strategy and thereby making it an opportune transcript for illustration purposes. It is representative of the data, however, in that the techniques highlighted here were used consistently across all discussion groups to encourage a variety of strategies according to students' needs.

By carrying the illustration one step farther, the teacher's shift from an interactional focus to a content focus can be more clearly demonstrated. Throughout the first cycle of literature discussion groups, students progressed in their understanding of interactional strategies. Students engaged in the strategies more often and showed a growing understanding of the discussion process. There was less silence and pausing in the groups as they became more comfortable in their ability to generate appropriate discussion in this situation.

As the shift in student competence occurred, Ms. P's role also began to shift. First, she

acted more as a participant than as a guide. Second, she altered her emphasis to focus on the content of the discussion. Specifically, she focused on expanding the students' conversations, pushing students toward more in-depth conversations. For example, keeping with our follow-up question example, in the first cycle her focus was on using follow-up questions to generate talk--some sort of fuel for discussion. In the second cycle, as students became more proficient in the discussion process, Ms. P encouraged follow-up questions as means to deepen or extend the conversation. In the following trasncript of a teacher intervention, Ms. P used a reconstructive recap to encourage students to build on each other's questions, adding an emotional element, in an effort to deepen the conversation.

> **Ms. P:** Ok, see how much that one question had a lot of other questions. What I want you guys to think about . . . When somebody asks a question and everyone answers it, see if there's another question you can think of that's not necessarily in your bookthat kind of ties in with that. Like Adam asked, 'have you moved?' and Chris didn't have his questions but he tied in with 'why did you move?' and then I asked "how did you feel when you moved?" . All of those questions are related to Adam's. [FN, 4/16/98]

Ms. P's intervention here has a very different emphasis than the interventions highlighted earlier. In this episode, in contrast to her earlier interactional focus, she was very interested in building and deepening the content of the discussion. Thus, as students' understandings of the discussion process developed, Ms. P's interventions shifted to focus on more content-related needs.

In sum, Ms. P used a variety of intervention techniques within the literature discussion groups to scaffold students' developing understandings of the discussion process. These techniques included direct and indirect elicitations, modelling, highlighting of strategies, and reconstructive recaps. The length and depth of the interventions, therefore, had to do with how students responded to a specific intervention. If the students understood what they should do and reacted accordingly, the intervention ended. If there was still confusion, the teacher acted in a way that elaborated or refined the strategy explanation or was more forceful with the request. For example, many instances of modeling came after a less explicit intervention that did not have enough of an influence on students' participation. Further, a pre-established understanding or a

shared knowledge of the strategies was necessary before the teacher was able to use less explicit forms of interventions. Finally, the focus of the teacher's interventions shifted from interactional to content-related as students gradually developed more interactional competence.

Conclusion

> Although it is widely accepted that one of the aims of education should be the induction of children into ways of using language for seeking, sharing and constructing knowledge, observational studies of classroom life reveal that this induction is rarely carried out in any systematic way. Teachers very rarely offer their pupils explicit guidance on such matters, and researchers have found that pupils commonly lack any clear, shared understanding of the purpose of many of the activities that they are engaged in and the criteria by which they are judged by teachers, and so are often confused (Mercer, 1998, p. 2).

Literature discussion groups are promoted as a more equitable way for students to share and discuss their responses to literature. However, it is important to note the complex and demanding task that faces participants--teachers and students--when moving from a recitation-style structure to one with decentralized patterns of interaction. This problematic transition is often overlooked by researchers and practitioners in their well-founded eagerness to herald the rich, meaningful discussions possible when students come together to lead their own discussions. The research analyzed in this paper indicates that the transition to more student-centered discussion formats can be problematic and may require the teacher's support as students develop new skills related to both the "how" (interactional aspect) and "what" (content-related aspects) of literature discussion groups.

The difficulty students can face in student-led groups has also been noted by others who have explored small group work. Mercer (1998), for example, found low instances of students engaging in *productive* talk, despite the prevalence of much talk in classrooms. Further, he found few instances of teachers trying to raise the quality of that talk. Other researchers, looking specifically at literature discussion groups, have noted the importance of teachers providing support for students, particularly in terms of students' interactional skills (Jewell & Pratt, 1999;

McMahon, 1996; Short et. al, 1999; Wells, 1995; Wiencek, 1996). Findings from the research reported here support and extend this research in several ways.

First, shifting from a teacher-led format to a student-led one is not a straightforward process for teachers or students. Shifting expectations of participation can lead to interactional difficulties. This finding supports Mercer's assertion that students often do not engage in productive talk within student groups. Second, in an extension of Mercer's findings, the teacher in this study did attempt to raise the quality of that talk. She scaffolded students in their appropriation of strategies, sometimes in overtly instructional ways, using a variety of interactional pedagogic techniques. Third, concerning teacher support, the metacognitive lens provided by the teacher enabled students to better understand the discussion process and their role in it, thereby facilitating their more expert participation and engagement in the dialogue.

The research described here helps develop a theoretical notion of how teachers guide students' progress in the discussion process by examining how this is expressed in classrooms. It provides new insights into how teacher language influences students' interactions and learning and explores the notion of scaffolding as it relates to discourse, not tasks. While others have noted the importance of providing support for students within student-led discussion groups, few have addressed this process at the point of teacher-student interactions during the actual discussions. The research reported here provides a beginning look at how a teacher scaffolds students during the moment-to-moment interactions within discussions and illustrates specific ways the teacher supports students' engagement in productive talk.

The results of this study provide encouragement to educators who are moving toward more facilitative roles within their classrooms. While many teachers are taking on these roles, research on the relationship between teacher actions and students' understandings has been limited. The findings of this study clearly indicate a progression in students' competency within this new discussion format that is influenced by the teacher's interventions during the discussions, thus offering support for teachers who wish to adopt more facilitative roles. It provides notions about

what this teacher did that was effective in cultivating more effective discussions and more competent "discussors." Teachers who desire to move toward using student-led discussion groups may find useful strategies for doing so in the findings reported here. In sum, the research reported in this paper provides insights as to how teachers scaffold students' understanding and competency within an emerging discussion format.

APPENDIX A

Transcription Conventions

Behavior/Speech Act	Description
Simultaneous speech	Where two people speak at once, the overlapping portion of their utterances are enclosed with slash marks (e.g., / /)
Interruptions	Where one person interrupts another, the speech ends with two slashes with the first speaker, and begins with two slashes with the second speaker (e.g., "that's like// //that's like adoption")
Tentative transcription	When the exact transcription of speech is difficult, this is indicated by enclosing a probably transcription in parentheses (e.g., " ( ))
Omitted conversation	When transcripts have been shortened, this is indicated by a series of dots (e.g., . . .)
Explanatory comments	When explanatory comments are added to a direct transcription, they are enclosed in brackets, (e.g., "that's just like when you [Mrs. P]")
Inaudible speech	Where words or phrases are completely inaudible, this is indicated by a series of asterisks enclosed in parentheses (e.g., (***))
Emphasis	Where a word or syllable is spoken with extra emphasis, it is underlined (e.g., "There is no love.")

APPENDIX B

Book: Molly's Pilgrim
First cycle; First discussion
3/16/98
Participants: Nancy, Anna, Angela, Evette, and Ms. P (all pseudonyms)

[Pause]
Nancy: She wanted to move back where she was from because all the students were making fun of her *[pause]* and her mother said that they can't go to a certain place because her father had to work very late *[pause]* and he was working hard and they probably had to look for another house
Anna: And, they had to make, all take a pin, and *[picks up book showing front cover]* and make a doll, take a pin and make one
Evette: Elizabeth was checking everybody's dolls and Molly put her doll in her desk because it didn't *[pause]* look like a pilgrim in the book *[pause]* and Elizabeth thought she didn't do her homework *[pause]* so and Molly said she did and pulled out her bag and pulled out her doll and Elizabeth and her friends laughed.
[Students are speaking with very little expression. Speech is rather stilted. Students don't seem to be listening carefully to other's comments; most look bored.]
Anna: She had told her mama about it and *** going to school and her mama said don't worry about it because the teacher might not understand but she'll see
[silence for almost a minute -- Ms. P looks up briefly and looks back down to her notes; students look down and around a little bit]
Anna: Angela? Nancy? *[Muffled, hard to hear] [Significant pause]*
N: Everybody was singing a song in music that she couldn't read//
Anna: Yeah
N: about her that she couldn't read very well *[pause]* and they made fun of her because she couldn't read and *** the doll
Ms. P; *[nods]*
[silence for about 20 seconds]

Ms. P: Ok, one thing that I've noticed that Anna's done, tried to do, is that she asked both Angela and Nancy to 'what do you think?' or just to say something, to try to get you guys involved in the discussion. Anna, thank you for doing that and trying to take on the responsibility, sweetie, of getting someone else to kind of add to the conversation. That's a hard thing to do because this is the first time we've really met to discuss a lot of things that we've read before so it's going to take a little bit of time to get used to it. Anna, Evette, thanks for jumping right on in. And Anna again thanks for asking both Angela and Nancy to get involved. And Nancy thanks for some of the things that you've said also.

One of the things that I've been noticing . . . is that you guys have been really really good at retelling what you've read, haven't you? Most of the things that you guys are talking about right now are things that have already happened in the story, things that you read, and your kind of talking about it, and sharing and kind of jumping in, so that everybody knows or remembers what happened in the story and you guys have done a fantastic job with that and a good way to start out; I haven't thought about it that way to start out with retelling what it was that you had read, especially since we've had a weekend in between. That was a fantastic idea and I wouldn't have thought about it on my own so thank you for kind of showing that strategy, for sharing that with me. . . . . .

And, how would you have felt if you were Molly walking in, knowing that your pilgrim doll didn't look quite like everybody else's? *[Pause]*
Nancy: Sad

Ms. P: ok *[moves her hands in a circular motion, trying to get other students to jump in]* Are you guys going to let her get away with just saying sad?
Anna: Sad and
Evette: ***
N: embarrassed
Ms. P: Is somebody going to ask why? Why did you feel sad, Nancy?
Anna: Because//
N: Because everybody's talking about it and it didn't look like the one in the book
Ms. P: and that would make you sad because?
N: Because they were making fun of her doll, saying that their doll was best than hers .
. . . .
N: I might want to feel embarrassed//
Anna: Because other people's *** were better than yours?
E: I would feel embarrassed because ***, the reason I would feel embarrassed was the doll didn't look like the one in the book
N: Why would you feel that way?
E: Because it didn't look like a pilgrim *[Nancy nods]*
. . . . .
Anna: sad and *[pause]*
Ms. P looks at group, kind of looking puzzled that they aren't talking
N: may feel mad at/ may feel mad
Ms. P:are you gonna//
E: Why would you feel mad? *[Ms. P smiles, pats E on knee, and says quietly 'good job, Evette']*
N: because . . You're kind of sad and your mad at the girl because she was making fun of you and the doll; get mad
. . . .
N: I would feel kind of very very, um very embarrassed when the teacher came up and said 'where is your doll' or '** your doll'. I'd feel very embarrassed if *[pause]* if she came up and said that and she's going to show it to the whole class
E: Why?
N: Because um when um she might um I might think that she would think that I didn't do my homework and she might pull my card
Ms. P: Good question. See how much we learned from Nancy because of your question? Wow. Nancy, what you might be able to do right here is to ask somebody else, 'how would you feel in that situation?'
N: *[turns to Angela]* how would you feel?
Angela: embarrassed
N: Why?
Angela: because the teacher might think I didn't do my homework *[looking at Ms. P as she finishes]*
Anna and Evette: Why?
Ms. P: ok, let's try to add instead of asking why, you guys are doing good on that, let's ask a little bit more. Why *[to Angela]* would you think the teacher might think you didn't do your homework?
Angela: Because I didn't have it out on my desk and I was hiding it under something
Ms. P: Ok, you guys are on the right track right here. Nancy shared something and then asked Angela. You guys asked both Nancy and Angela to explain a little bit more. And Anna just felt that she was able to share right after Angela. She didn't have to be asked, she just felt like she could. Anna thanks for jumping on in. What other things did you think, that stuck out to you in this chapter, in this portion that you read, that you really wanted to share and talk about// [Transcript, 3/16/99]

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